

REFER TO DOS

FINAL DRAFT

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

ACTION

13 October 1969

DOS REVIEWED 11-Jan-2011: NO OBJECTION TO DECLASSIFICATION.

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Peter W. Rodman *PWR*

SUBJECT: Survey of N. Y. Times Editorials on U.S. Viet-Nam
Policy, Jan. 1968 - Oct. 1969.

Attached is a revised version of the survey and analysis you wanted of New York Times editorials on U.S. Viet-Nam policy. I decided to cover the last two years in order to see how the Times has behaved since the beginning of the trend of U.S. concessions.

For the period January 1968 - January 1969, I have relied mostly on the summaries of editorials as given by the N. Y. Times Index, but for the period of the Nixon Administration I have quoted from the editorials themselves in all their splendor.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the memorandum to the President enclosing the two tabs.

Attachments:

Analytical Summary (Tab A)

Survey (Tab B)

(Peter Rodman:srl:10-13-69)

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTONCONFIDENTIAL

October 14, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *AK*

SUBJECT: Survey of New York Times Editorial Policy on
Vietnam from January 1968 to October 1969

At Tab A is an analytical summary of The New York Times editorial policy during the period of U. S. concessions on Vietnam. At Tab B are extracts from editorials which demonstrate the growth of demands for concessions, beginning with the call for a bombing halt in June 1968 and extending to present demands for a stand-still ceasefire.

The survey indicates that in every aspect of U. S. policy where limited concessions have been made, The New York Times has first welcomed the move and then pressed the President for a greater concession along the same lines. The general pattern has been as follows:

- A U. S. concession is urged and it is implied that Hanoi will respond favorably.
- The U. S. concession is applauded immediately after it occurs.
- After a month or so further concessions are urged. Lack of progress is blamed on Washington or Saigon. The earlier concession is disparaged, or the U. S. is accused of having hardened its position, or Hanoi is said to have already reciprocated.

The following are some specific examples:

- The partial bombing halt was applauded, but The New York Times pressed for a total halt 3-1/2 months later.
- Two and a half months after the total bombing halt began, the Times pressed for troop withdrawals.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

- After first calling for mutual troop withdrawals, The New York Times demanded withdrawals regardless of Hanoi's response.
- In April 1969 the Times praised a cutback in B-52 raids but at the same time called for a reduction in search and destroy missions. On July 25 a reduction in these missions was reported, but within two weeks the Times had called for a stand-still ceasefire.
- Although a May 1969 editorial referred to anticipated cutbacks of 50-100,000 men as "substantial," the paper subsequently complained that the withdrawal of 60,000 was "timid" and not "significant."
- In May 1969 a coalition commission to supervise free elections in South Vietnam was recommended, but by June agreement to an "interim coalition" was urged.

In 1969 The New York Times has kept some unsatisfied demand for greater concessions before the public at all times. Significant concessions have only been met by calls by the editors of The New York Times for further concessions. In addition, criticism of the President has intensified. For example, a July editorial commented on the "forward looking proposals from Washington and Saigon," while an October editorial attacked the President for "not [having] brought any significant new ideas to the Viet-Nam problem."

Attachments

CONFIDENTIAL

SURVEY OF N. Y. TIMES EDITORIALS ON U.S. VIET-NAM POLICY,
JANUARY 1968 -- OCTOBER 1969

ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Introductory Note: The footnotes below give the full documentation of the general conclusions stated in the summary. The dates in the footnotes refer to dates of editorials which are summarized or quoted in the full Survey (at Tab B).

A. Overall Pattern

The survey of N. Y. Times editorials in 1968-69 on U.S. policy in Viet-Nam reveals the following overall pattern:

The editorial writer advises the President that a particular U.S. concession will be the key to peace, and that the only way to get negotiations moving is for the U.S. to take the initiative and make that concession.¹ Often there is an explicit assurance in the editorial that Hanoi will respond favorably;² more often there is an implication that a U.S. concession will bear fruit as a test of Hanoi's intentions.³ Immediately after the U.S. has

1. E.g., Jan. 5, 1968, Feb. 25, 1968 (bombing halt); May 12, 1968 (ceasefire); July 13, 1968, Aug. 8, 1968 (total bombing halt); Dec. 26, 1968, Jan. 19, 1969 (mutual troop withdrawal); Jan. 30, 1969 (U.S. troop withdrawal); Apr. 3, 1969 (reduction of search-&-destroy missions; U.S. troop withdrawal); May 14, 1969, May 15, 1969, June 10, 1969 (coalition electoral commission); May 18, 1969 (U.S. troop withdrawal); May 31, 1969 (timetable for U.S. troop withdrawal); Aug. 5, 1969, Aug. 16, 1969, Aug. 30, 1969 (cutback of offensive operations; standstill cease-fire); Sept. 7, 1969 (cease-fire for Ho's funeral).

2. E.g., Jan. 5, 1968, Feb. 25, 1968 (bombing halt); May 31, 1969 (U.S. troop withdrawal).

3. E.g., Aug 8, 1968 (total bombing halt); Mar. 21, 1969 (U.S. troop withdrawal); Aug 31, 1969 (cease-fire); Sept. 7, 1969 (Ho funeral truce).

made the recommended concession, the editorial writer applauds it, and says that, indeed, it is now time for Hanoi to respond.⁴ But, after a few weeks or months go by without significant progress toward peace, the editorial writer, as a rule, begins to urge a further U.S. concession,⁵ on the ground that the lack of progress is the fault of the United States⁶ or Saigon.⁷ He either disparages the importance of the earlier U.S. concession,⁸

4. E.g., Apr. 1, 1968, Apr. 2, 1968 (partial bombing halt); Oct. 21, 1968, Nov. 1, 1968 (total bombing halt); July 28, 1969 (U.S. troop withdrawal).

5. E.g., May 12, 1968 (cease-fire, after partial bombing halt); May 15, 1968 (freeze on external forces, after partial bombing halt); Jan. 19, 1969, Jan. 30, 1969 (troop withdrawal, after bombing halt); Apr. 3, 1969 (reduction of search-&-destroy missions, after B-52 cutback); May 15, 1969 (coalition electoral commission, after May 14 speech); May 18, 1969 (unilateral troop withdrawal, after May 14 speech); June 10, 1969 (interim coalition, after June withdrawal announcement); Aug. 5, 1969, Aug. 16, 1969, Aug. 30, 1969 (cease-fire, defensive ground tactics, after June withdrawal announcement); Oct. 2, 1969 (after Sept. withdrawal announcement).

6. E.g., May 12, 1968, July 13, 1968 (stepped-up military activity); Aug. 2, 1968 (stiffened terms); May 5, 1969 (continued pursuit of military victory); May 17, 1969 (failure to slow down offensive operations; delay in withdrawing troops); Aug. 16, 1969 (failure to propose cease-fire or de-escalation); Aug. 25, 1969 (delay in withdrawing troops); Aug. 31, 1969 (continued military pressure; ignoring lull; delay in withdrawing troops); Oct. 2, 1969 (aggressive ground tactics; tokenism of withdrawals, ignoring Ho funeral truce).

7. E.g., May 8, 1968 (should broaden its base); Dec. 26, 1968 (refusal to negotiate with NLF); May 5, 1969 (jailing of opponents; procrastination with land reform); May 17, 1969 (jailing of opponents); Aug. 25, 1969 (replacement of Premier); Sept. 12, 1969 (balking at Ho funeral truce).

8. E.g., May 5, 1968 (partial bombing halt); Nov. 1, 1968, Mar. 1, 1969 (total bombing halt); May 15, 1969, May 17, 1969 (May 14 Speech); Aug. 16, 1969, Oct. 2, 1969 (troop withdrawal, etc.).

or argues that Hanoi has in fact reciprocated,⁹ or accuses the United States of hardening its own position in the meantime.¹⁰

B. Particular Patterns

The following particular patterns recur:

1. Continual concessions. The Times editorial writer urges a U.S. concession on occasions when the other side seems conciliatory (in order to seize the opportunity for peace),¹¹ and also on occasions when the other side seems to be intensifying the war (because this is proof that our military effort alone will not be enough to bring peace).¹² This somewhat one-track approach (continual calls for U.S. concessions) is justified according to a variety of premises: (a) the key to peace is to prove our good faith to the

9. E.g., Apr. 11, 1968 (lifting the siege of Khesanh); May 4, 1968 (start of Paris talks); July 13, 1968, Aug. 8, 1968 (lulls in fighting); Mar. 1, 1969 (easing of Communist attacks); May 9, 1969 (Front's 10 Points); May 18, 1969 (initial response to May 14 Speech); July 28, 1969, Aug. 25, 1969, Aug. 31, 1969 (lulls); Aug. 16, 1969 (virtual cessation of infiltration).

10. E.g., May 5, 1968 (U.S. language after opening of Paris talks); July 13, 1968 (U.S. expansion of war); Aug. 2, 1968 (demand for explicit Hanoi promise); Mar. 9, 1969, May 5, 1969 (step-up in allied attacks); Aug. 25, 1969, Aug. 31, 1969 (lull in fighting).

11. E.g., July 13, 1968, Aug. 8, 1968 (lull in fighting); Jan. 19, 1969, Mar. 1, 1969 (opening of expanded talks); May 18, 1969 (initial response to May 14 Speech); June 10, 1969 (Front's 10 Points); July 28, 1969, Aug. 25, 1969, Aug. 31, 1969 (lull in fighting).

12. E.g., Feb. 1, 1968, Feb. 4, 1968 (Tet offensive); May 8, 1968, May 12, 1968 (enemy "second wave"); Mar. 9, 1969 (spring offensive); July 28, 1969 (stalled talks); Aug. 16, 1969 (enemy attacks).

other side, and to abandon all efforts for military victory;¹³ (b) the prospect of U.S. withdrawal is the best way to bring pressure on Saigon to adopt the necessary conciliatory posture;¹⁴ and (c) the policy of Vietnamization is an effective way to put pressure on Hanoi.¹⁵

2. Progression of concessions. In every aspect of Viet-Nam policy in which the United States has made a limited concession, the Times has first welcomed the concession and then pressed the President for a further concession along the same lines: (a) For example, the Times applauded President Johnson's partial bombing halt of March 31, 1968, but three and one half months later began pressing for a total bombing halt.¹⁶ The Times was optimistic about Hanoi's responsiveness to a total bombing halt, once that occurred, but soon began pressing for troop withdrawal.¹⁷ (b) The call

13. E.g., Apr. 3, 1969 (cutback of search-&-destroy missions); May 5, 1969, May 17, 1969 (defensive posture, U.S. withdrawal); May 18, 1969 (U.S. withdrawal); June 10, 1969 (interim coalition); Sept. 5, 1969 (Ho Chi Minh funeral truce).

15. E.g., Dec. 26, 1968 (mutual withdrawal); Mar. 21, 1969 (U.S. withdrawal); May 31, 1969 (timetable for U.S. withdrawal); July 28, 1969 (further U.S. withdrawal).

14. E.g., Dec. 26, 1968 (mutual withdrawal); May 5, 1969, May 17, 1969 (defensive posture, U.S. withdrawal); May 31, 1969 (timetable for withdrawal); Aug. 30, 1969 (major U.S. withdrawal, defensive posture, cease-fire); Sept. 17, 1969 (quicker withdrawal).

16. April 1, 1968, Apr. 2, 1968 (praise of partial bombing halt); July 13, 1968 (call for total bombing halt).

17. Nov. 1, 1968 (optimism after total bombing halt); Jan. 19, 1969 (call for troop withdrawals).

for troop withdrawal began as a call for mutual troop withdrawals, but this soon developed into a call for U.S. initiation of the process of mutual withdrawal, then escalated to a demand for U.S. troop withdrawals regardless of Hanoi's response, and then to a demand for a timetable of such U.S. withdrawals.¹⁸

(c) As for the scale of U.S. withdrawals, the Times originally called for the U.S. simply to "initiate" or "begin" such withdrawal. (An editorial in May referred to anticipated U.S. cutbacks of 50-100,000 men as "substantial".)¹⁹ After U.S. withdrawal began to occur, the Times first welcomed this as "a step toward disengagement," but later began to grumble that the withdrawal of 60,000 was "timid" and "token," and not "significant" or "adequate".²⁰

(d) In May 1969, the Times called for a "coalition electoral commission" to supervise free elections in South Viet-Nam. But by June -- a month before Saigon offered to establish such a joint commission -- the Times was calling for the negotiation of "an agreement... on the future government of South Viet-Nam," i.e., an "interim coalition."²¹

18. Jan. 19, 1969 (mutual withdrawal); Jan. 30, 1969, Mar. 21, 1969, (U.S. initiation); May 18, 1969 (unilateral withdrawal); May 31, 1969 (timetable for U.S. withdrawals).

19. Jan. 30, 1969 ("initiate"); Mar. 21, 1969 ("begin"); May 31, 1969 (50-100,000 as "substantial").

20. June 10, 1969 ("a step"); Sept. 17, 1969 ("timid," not "significant"); Sept. 27, 1969 (not "adequate"); Oct. 2, 1969 ("token").

21. May 14, 1969 (coalition electoral commission); June 10, 1969 (interim coalition).

(e) The Times began calling for a cutback of search-&-destroy missions in April 1969. The Times' own news columns on July 25 reported that such a reduction ^{was about to} ~~had~~ taken place. Within two weeks, the Times was calling for a standstill cease-fire.²²

3. Acceleration of concessions. As suggested above, most major U.S. concessions have been applauded (or at least "welcomed") by the Times at the time they occurred. But the length of the "grace period" between this applause and the launching of the editorial campaign for the next major concession has steadily shrunk: The Times waited 3 1/2 months after the partial bombing halt before calling for a total bombing halt;²³ it waited over 2 1/2 months after the total bombing halt before raising the call for troop withdrawals.²⁴ But in 1969 there has never been a moment in which some Times recommendation of a concession has not been outstanding and unsatisfied. Whenever the President has announced some U.S. concession that the Times had been urging upon him, the Times has simply taken up recommending another concession. In some cases, this other concession is a brand new one.²⁵ In other cases it is one that the editorial writer had

22. Apr. 3, 1969 (call for cutback); Aug. 5, 1969 (call for cease-fire).

23. Apr. 1, 1968 (approval of partial bombing halt); July 13, 1968 (call for total bombing halt).

24. Nov. 1, 1968 (approval of total bombing halt); Jan. 19, 1969 (call for troop withdrawals).

25. E.g., Aug 5, 1969 (call for cease-fire, after July 25 report of search-&-destroy cutback).

recommended earlier, along with his recommendation of the concession actually made;²⁶ he simply raises it to the status of a primary recommendation in order to "take up the slack" left by the U.S. Government's announced ~~the~~ **concession**.

C. Unexplained Loss of Confidence in the President

At this writing (mid-October), the Times' confidence in the Nixon Administration is at a low point, and it is not clear why. As recently as the end of July and the beginning of August, the Times was undisturbed by, and even complimentary to, the President's Viet-Nam policy. The fall from grace seems to have occurred gradually over the month of August.

The distance one can plummet in the fall from grace is illustrated by the comparison between the editorials of July 28, 1969, and October 2, 1969 (both of which are quoted in full in the Survey at Tab B). The editorial of July 28 noted the "forward-looking proposals from Washington and Saigon," and agreed with the President that the burden was on Hanoi to respond. The editorial of October 2 attacked him for "not [having] brought any significant new ideas to the Viet-Nam problem."

One can only conclude that (a) new ideas can grow old in two months, or that (b) the Times has a short memory, or, more generally, that (c) the Times' opinion of the President has nothing to do with what he actually does.

26. E.g., preceding the June 8 Midway announcement of U.S. troop withdrawal, the Times had already begun calling for a cutback of search-&-destroy missions (Apr. 3, 1969), for a coalition electoral commission (May 14, 1969), and for a timetable for U.S. withdrawal (May 31, 1969).

SURVEYA. The Call for a Bombing Halt, January - May, 1968.

The editorial of January 5, 1968, took note of the recent North Vietnamese statement that they "will" talk (instead of "would" talk) after the United States halts its bombing of the North. It is time for President Johnson to make a move to open peace talks, the editorial said, and a beginning should be made through a cessation of the bombing.

An editorial on January 21, 1968, declared that the Johnson Administration's charge that its critics failed to put forward realistic alternatives to the current U. S. policy "is even less true now than before." The editorial discussed the series of proposals that had been made in recent days for defusing the war (de-escalation in the South, cessation of the bombing of the North, recognition of the N. L. F.), and said that, while none of the proposals are new, perhaps never before have they been put forth by so many distinguished advocates at one time.

On January 24, 1968, the editorial writer was more sympathetic: He noted Hanoi's harsh public response to the Johnson stand on peace talks and said that Washington's position may have been more flexible in private contacts with North Viet-Nam. If these reports are true, he wrote, North Viet-Nam may not really be interested in peace talks; he noted U Thant's charge that both sides have been guilty of "simplistic" demands.

The Communist Tet offensive was launched January 30-31, 1968. The editorial of February 1, 1968, declared that the enemy's offensive "offers painful proof of the limitations of American power in Asia." The editorial stated that the raids undermined the optimism about the course of the war voiced recently in Saigon and Washington. If such is their aim, it continued, the Communists have chosen a bloody road to peace; as a "last massive push to improve their bargaining position in anticipation of a bid toward peace," the current battles could conceivably mark a preliminary step toward negotiations. The editorial of February 4, 1968, noting President Johnson's optimistic reaction to the Tet offensive, said that if the offensive proves anything it is that the bombing of the North has failed in its purpose.

The editorial of February 25, 1968, noted the reports of a possible U.S. troop increase and declared that "the time has come for the United States to realize that escalation is illogical." The column urged a halt to the bombing, citing the statement of U Thant that if the United States unconditionally ended the bombing of the North, the United States could reasonably assume that North Viet-Nam would deal in "good faith" with the issue of the ground fighting.

On March 24, 1968, the editorial writer called for a new U.S. strategy on the ground. He stated that the transfer of Gen. Westmoreland could mark a basic turning point in the war, but only if it is accompanied by a change in strategy; he backed the idea of defending populated areas, and stated that the futility of allied-initiated escalation has long been evident.

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson ordered a partial halt to the bombing of the North. The editorial of April 1, 1968, was sympathetic: The President's decision not to seek re-election, it said, reflects the profound malaise that Americans are experiencing as a direct result of the war. It said that the President might be back in the running if his peace proposals succeed. The President's order to curtail the bombing, it concluded, "leaves the next move up to North Vietnam." The editorial of April 2, 1968, declared that The President's offer "is a peace overture that Hanoi and its allies can refuse to recognize only at a tragic cost to themselves and to the world." Hanoi and Moscow must realize, the column continued, that the President "goes as far as any American leader can be expected to go"; it concluded that "the possibilities for a negotiated settlement will never be better than they are now."

The editorial of April 11, 1968, pointed to the enemy's withdrawal from the area of Khesanh as a possible sign of enemy restraint that Secretary Rusk apparently did not see when he complained of the lack of enemy response.

On April 11, 1968, Secretary of Defense Clifford announced that the United States was imposing a ceiling of 549,500 on the number of its troops in Viet-Nam. The editorial of April 14, 1968, approved, differentiating between a "cease-fire" in the air war over North Viet-Nam and a cease-fire in the ground action in the South. The editorial stated that "it should be possible" to arrange a complete cease-fire over North Viet-Nam, but noted the difficulty of achieving a cease-fire in the South.

The agreement on Paris as the site for peace talks was announced on May 3, 1968. The editorial of May 4, 1968, said that the accord on the site "marks a major diplomatic breakthrough," and declared that Washington's patient search has been gratifyingly rewarded. The editorial concluded that "concern over the genuineness of Hanoi's interest in talking has been g

An editorial one day later, on May 5, 1968, declared that the talks should mean the beginning of the end of the war, and warned against the U.S. 's digging a trap for itself by making confusing statements. It would be a tragedy, the column continued, if the United States stiffens its terms for a settlement now. The editorial stressed that there would be no justification in delaying the talks by exaggerating the value of the bombing of the North. On May 8, 1968, the editorial noted the current enemy assaults and stated that they could have an unsettling effect on the allied political position. The Saigon regime should be moving now to broaden its base, the column continued.

The editorial of May 12, 1968, noted that the opening of talks was taking place against the "unpromising background of stepped-up military activity on both sides," and stated that "no settlement can be reached until a cease-fire is agreed upon." The editorial foresaw lengthy negotiations, but opposed a rigid United States position.

The substantive talks opened on May 13, 1968. An editorial on May 15, 1968, noted the demands and stands of both sides and urged that the parties discuss a freeze of all external forces in South Viet-Nam at their present levels, after all bombing of North Viet-Nam is halted.

B. The Call for a Total Bombing Halt, July - December, 1968.

On July 13, 1968, the editorial pointed out that the Paris talks had been stalemated for two months because Hanoi continued to insist on a complete bombing halt before moving to substantive discussions. It is not clear that the U.S. has reduced the level of hostilities, the column suggested, listing the indications of a U.S. expansion of the war (increases in the number of U.S. air missions over the North and in the number of troops in the South). The editorial noted the lull in the fighting in the South and queried if the situation was not a sign of enemy restraint. Finally, the column urged a cessation of the bombing, on the ground that possible signals opening the way to peace should not be allowed to go untested.

The editorial of August 2, 1968, criticized Secretary Rusk's demand -- that North Viet-Nam go on record with a commitment to reduce its war effort before the U.S. could stop the bombing -- as "impossible." The editorial noted the tougher conditions set by Johnson and Rusk in the days preceding, and the continuing build-up and aggressive action by U.S. troops in South Viet-Nam, and pointed to the lull in the fighting as a ground for concluding that North Viet-Nam had met the requirements originally set

by the President. An editorial on August 8, 1968, noting political developments in the United States and the lull in the ground fighting, declared that "the time is ripe to test Hanoi's intentions" with a total bombing halt.

The United States announced the cessation of all bombing of the North on October 31, 1968. In an editorial on October 21, 1968, the Times welcomed what were by then reliable signs that the bombing was about to be halted. The editorial noted that the preceding five months had seen far more ground covered than was generally realized, and pointed out a shift in North Viet-Nam's attitude on some principles essential to ultimate agreement. *The next move, it said, is up to Hanoi.*

On the morning after the announcement of the bombing halt, the editorial of November 1, 1968, declared that the search for a political settlement could now begin. It stated that most of the principles of settlement expounded by both sides were similar, but that the nature of the future government of South Viet-Nam would not be a simple matter to resolve. It cautioned that there was no "contract" with North Viet-Nam for military restraint. What is important, the column concluded, is that a policy that failed has been put aside; the future prospect of peace can now be discerned.

C. The Call for Mutual Troop Withdrawals, December 1968 - May 1969

An editorial on December 26, 1968, noting the Christmas cease-fire and Saigon's and the N. L. F.'s reluctance to negotiate with each other, queried how long the United States and North Viet-Nam would let the maneuvers of their allies set the pace of talks. The editorial said that the answer to the temptation of Saigon and the N. L. F. to continue the struggle rather than face the political risks of peace is pointed out by Clifford and Kissinger, who both recommend the withdrawal of foreign troops in order to maximize the incentive for the contending forces in South Viet-Nam to work out a political settlement. The pivotal element, the column concluded, is the Kissinger proposal, backed by Clifford, for secret bilateral talks between the United States and North Viet-Nam.

The editorial of January 19, 1969, hailed the procedural accord that enabled the expanded talks to begin, and stated that the opportunity to move toward early settlement must be urgently probed. The first objective, the editorial declared, should be mutual troop withdrawal.

On January 30, 1969, the Times editorial had kind words for Ambassador Lodge's presentation before the Paris meeting. Lodge's proposals, the editorial noted, simplified the Johnson Administration's longer agenda of proposals. The column said that the critical question was when to seek agreement on the partial withdrawal of external troops, and urged the U.S. to initiate the first phase of mutual troop withdrawals soon.

A wave of Communist attacks began in South Viet-Nam in late February. The editorial of March 1, 1969, noted that the easing of these Communist attacks gave hope of ending a crisis that might have endangered the Paris talks and led to full-scale resumption of the war. The editorial urged the Nixon Administration to "clear up the ambiguity" surrounding the bombing-halt understanding of the previous October 31. The Times declared that this ambiguity served the Johnson Administration as a means of veiling from American public opinion its diplomatic retreat on the bombing issue, but that the Nixon Administration had much to lose by keeping alive the myth that North Viet-Nam had entered into an agreement not to attack South Vietnamese cities. An editorial on March 9, 1969, noting the President's press conference warnings against continued Communist attacks, stated that the challenge confronting Mr. Nixon was to resist the Johnson tendency to react "as if his manhood were at stake." The column argued against a resumption of the bombing. Pointing out the increases in allied attacks in late 1968, the editorial said that the U.S. cannot demand the right to press the fighting while charging a double-cross whenever the Communists do the same. Military victory is impossible, the editorial concluded; the only real hope lies in the peace talks.

The editorial of March 21, 1969, declared that the President's announcement of his intention to begin American force reductions this year offers the best method of putting pressure on Hanoi to do likewise, and the best hope of breaking the stalemate in the Paris peace talks.

An editorial on April 3, 1969, praised the Administration for taking a "welcome and overdue step toward de-escalating the war" with its announcement of a cut-back of B-52 raids, but queried why Secretary Laird felt obliged to deny that the reduction represented a deliberate bid to lower the combat level. The column continued: "The Administration, committed to the energetic pursuit of the Paris peace talks, should now underscore its readiness to move more rapidly from war to peace by taking additional steps to scale down the fighting. One such measure could be a reduction in the search-and-destroy missions which the American command has pressed with increased vigor since the bombing halt of last Nov. 1. If there is a response from the other side, withdrawals of some American forces could

be started in a further effort to set reciprocal disengagement in motion while a political settlement is negotiated." The editorial writer pointed out that "a climate of de-escalation encourages the kind of negotiation that alone can restore peace."

An editorial on May 5, 1969, said that tentative signs of new movement in the Paris talks tempered but could not wholly allay some doubts about U.S. policy; it noted some aspects of allied behavior that provoked doubts about American determination to bring the war to a speedy end: "The American military command continues to press the fight as though still in pursuit of a military victory. A defensive posture would be more conducive to peace. It would also facilitate the withdrawal of some American troops." "On the political front," the editorial went on, "some of President Thieu's recent actions at home have been inconsistent with his stated willingness to move toward settlement." The column noted Thieu's "harsh crackdown on all who dare hint at compromise with the Communists," and the fact that Thieu "continues to procrastinate on long-promised land reform."

An editorial on May 9, 1969, declared that the N. L. F.'s 10-Point program was a significant step toward a settlement: The program's significance "lies more in its timing and manner than in the plan itself, though it does contain some new elements that could clear the way for speeding an end to this dismal war. Most encouraging is that, by failing this time to insist that its program is the only basis for settlement, the Front appears to be setting the stage for substantive negotiations." The editorial continued: "The seriousness of this intent will be measured by the Front's willingness now to move into private discussions with Saigon's representatives on the details of its proposals and the counterproposals the Thieu regime must lose no time in putting forward. A heavy responsibility rests on Saigon to demonstrate the sincerity of its desire for swift movement in private talks."

D. The Call for a Joint Electoral Commission, May 1969.

An editorial on May 14, 1969, anticipating the Presidential speech scheduled for that evening, declared that the central political issue in Viet-Nam was the nature of the interim body that would supervise the election of a new national assembly. The editorial backed the proposal put forth by Clark Kerr's group for a coalition Electoral Commission to control the elections in South Viet-Nam.

The editorial the next day, May 15, 1969, stated that the President's speech "contains no major advances," but admitted that it clarified some ambiguities in earlier American proposals. The column emphasized, however, that "what is mainly missing" is some response to the enemy's proposal for an interim coalition government to conduct elections in South Viet-Nam. The editorial renewed its recommendation of a coalition Electoral Commission to conduct elections.

A further editorial on the President's speech, a few days later on May 17, 1969, pointed to the fact that the Paris talks were one year old, and blamed both sides for the lack of progress: The Administration justly criticized the Communists, the editorial stated, for coupling their recent peace initiatives with widespread attacks. "But the United States similarly compromises its diplomacy with a persisting policy of military aggressiveness. It is time both sides pulled back to defensive postures."

The same editorial continued:

"President Nixon's failure to slow down offensive operations and his delay in recalling some American troops -- in spite of 'excellent' progress in strengthening South Vietnamese forces -- indicate his reluctance to 'take some risks for peace.' Nor, despite his 'close relationship with Saigon,' has he indirectly succeeded in greatly advancing the American objective of a truly representative South Vietnamese Government. President Thieu continues to jail non-Communist South Vietnamese who speak out for compromise.

"The time has come indeed for initiatives that should be demonstrated with deeds as well as words."

E. The Call for Unilateral Troop Withdrawal, May - July, 1969.

A further editorial on the President's May 14 speech, on May 18, 1969, stated that the most useful single element in the Nixon program was its accent on flexibility. The editorial cited the North Vietnamese and N. L. F. assurances that they do intend to negotiate seriously on the Nixon program as well as on their own program, and labeled this initial Communist response "moderately encouraging." The best way to get action on the Nixon troop-withdrawal proposal, the column concluded, was for the U. S. to start sending home troops.

The editorial of May 31, 1969, urged the Administration to announce a timetable for US withdrawal, as "the only way for President Nixon to bring home both to Mr. Thieu and to his political backers the seriousness of the American intention to end the war." The column noted that: "The impression has been given that substantial cutbacks -- of 50,000 to 100,000 men -- would be set in motion before the end of the year." It cited Ambassador Harriman's belief that "Hanoi would respond to American reductions with withdrawals of its own, and that a degree of tacit disengagement would be achieved. But beyond this hope /the column went on/, there are indications that Hanoi is anxious to achieve a political settlement by agreement with the U.S. before American withdrawal. Most important, Hanoi fears that American troop reductions would reduce pressure in the United States for total American withdrawal and, in effect, permit the United States to stay in South Vietnam longer."

An editorial immediately following the Midway announcement of the first U.S. troop reduction recommended an "interim coalition" for South Viet-Nam. The Midway decision, the editorial of June 10, 1969, conceded, is "a step toward American disengagement." The column noted that "two other decisions taken at Midway /on land reform, and on a new election proposal/ may prove ultimately to be of importance. But not enough is known about them yet for a judgment to be made." The editorial stated:

"The political future of South Vietnam is what the war is all about. Mutual withdrawal of external forces -- which could be brought about tacitly by American troop cuts -- can begin but it cannot be completed until an agreement can be negotiated on the future government of South Vietnam.

"The ten points advanced by the National Liberation Front and Mr. Nixon's eight points coincide to a considerable degree, as both sides have acknowledged. But it is unlikely that Hanoi and the N. L. F. can be enticed into serious private talks until the central point of disagreement -- an interim coalition -- is opened for negotiations as well."

On July 11, Saigon and Washington announced our proposals for a joint electoral commission. A Times news column on July 25 quoted U.S. officials as saying that the Pentagon had revised its guidelines for U.S. commanders in the field in such a way as to reduce search-and-destroy missions. These two major U.S. concessions in July did not go unnoticed in the Times editorial pages: On July 28, 1969, the editorial complimented the President for his "forward-looking proposals" and lamented the absence of a Communist response. This editorial is worth quoting in full, for purposes of comparison with what comes later:

The editorial of July 28, 1969, went as follows:

The Withdrawal Strategy

"The continuing delay by Hanoi and the National Liberation Front in opening serious private peace negotiations in Paris leaves the United States with no choice but to proceed with an alternative strategy, Vietnamization of the war.

"The Paris talks of course will go on. The United States halted the bombing of North Vietnam on assurances -- from the Russians, among others -- that there would be serious negotiations. But if negotiations remain stalled, if forward-looking proposals from Washington and Saigon are unanswered, then other means of achieving American disengagement must be pursued.

"The withdrawal of 25,000 American troops and President Nixon's statement that he hoped to bring home most of the remaining ground combat forces before the end of next year marked the first stage of this alternative strategy. It is a strategy based on strengthening and modernizing the South Vietnamese Army and, starting immediately, turning over to it progressively the major combat responsibilities.

"The rate of American withdrawal naturally will also be affected by the degree of North Vietnamese withdrawal. If the slowdown in reinforcement of North Vietnamese forces continues -- leading to a gradual reduction of Hanoi's troops in South Vietnam -- American troops can be brought home at a relatively rapid pace. A continuation of the present military lull, which increasingly calls for a reciprocal American gesture of de-escalation, might even permit the withdrawal of American troops to be speeded up. Most military men agree that the South Vietnamese can be prepared to take over all but helicopter combat operations -- with, perhaps, some American logistical and continuing air support -- in less than eighteen months.

"There is always the possibility that South Vietnam's army will be defeated in battle. But that would force the United States to remain longer, and it is unlikely that Hanoi would want to run that risk by testing Saigon's military prowess at this time -- although there might well be such a test after a unilateral American withdrawal was completed.

"Does unilateral American withdrawal encourage Hanoi to block negotiations in Paris and keep its troops in South Vietnam? The reverse is probably true. Hanoi's refusal to negotiate means continued warfare with the South Vietnamese armed forces of a million

men -- aided by American logistical and air support, which would still have to be negotiated out of the country one day. And that negotiation, at a time when American ground combat forces and casualties had been reduced to a minimum, would take place under conditions more favorable to the Administration in Washington.

"Hanoi's choice is between a negotiated peace -- which means early, speedy and complete American withdrawal, plus an important political role in South Vietnam for the N. L. F. -- and a continued war with unforeseeable consequences. But whether Hanoi chooses peace or war, the American disengagement policy now is unlikely to be altered except as to the withdrawal rate."

F. The Call for a Stand-still Cease-Fire, August --

The editorial of August 5, 1969, commented on the occasion of the President's return from his Asian tour and his restatements of traditional American policy, declaring that the time had come for a policy recognizing the military stalemate and accepting the status quo. The editorial called for a standstill cease-fire, and for a political proposal recognizing the existing partition of South Viet-Nam into regions controlled by Communists or Saigon, as steps toward a permanent political settlement.

The editorial of August 16, 1969, after the enemy's 2-month lull in ground fighting had been interrupted by two days of attacks on August 11-12, noted that this increased level of enemy attacks "complicates" the President's decision on the next U. S. troop withdrawal. "But," the column commented, "it is evident that an opportunity was lost to test this de-escalation strategy." The editorial continued:

"The question now is what the proper American reaction should be. North Vietnamese troop infiltration has virtually ceased, suggesting a Hanoi intention of tapering off the level of its forces in the south, if not their activity. The United States has proposed neither a cease-fire nor reciprocal de-escalation. It cannot logically expect the other side to stop fighting because it announces a 5 per cent reduction in forces.

.....
 "The policy of American troop reductions is sound, but it needs bulwarking by de-escalation and cease-fire proposals."

On August 25, 1969, the editorial complained that the President's decision to defer another withdrawal announcement, and Thieu's choice of a general to replace a civilian as Premier, "are poor auguries for peace." The President should have strengthened his policy of phased unilateral withdrawal and Vietnamization, the column said. "Instead, "he gives the impression of becoming an instrument of the Saigon regime ... and of the shifting military tactics of Hanoi." The editorial stated that enemy-initiated military action had remained below normal, despite the brief upsurge of August 11-12, and concluded: "What is needed now is not a halt in American troop withdrawals but their continuation, linked with proposals for de-escalation of fighting, and negotiation of a standstill cease-fire."

The editorial of August 30, 1969, stated that the United States "has plenty of latitude for ordering major reductions without endangering the allied military position." Such reductions must be pushed vigorously, the editorial writer affirmed, "if Thieu is to be encouraged to broaden his appeal and seek accommodation with the Viet Cong in Paris." The column urged the United States to "assume -- in the absence of specific contrary evidence -- that the lull is a political signal," and to shift U.S. forces over to defensive tactics. The editorial repeated the recommendation of a standstill cease-fire.

By August 31, 1969, the Times had concluded that President Nixon "seems to be slipping toward the same quagmire that seized and finally submerged President Johnson." "Mr. Nixon's fundamental error from the first has been the assumption that he has time for intricate maneuvers in diplomacy, psychological warfare and military tactics -- maneuvers that might enable him to gain at the conference table what American military power has been unable to wrest from the Communists on the ground." The editorial cited the orders to Gen. Abrams to "maintain maximum pressure," and complained that the battlefield lull was "first ignored, then met with a minimum response." "Worse still," the column went on, "after a brief two-day upsurge in Communist operations occurred Aug. 11 and 12 -- and in the face of a swift acknowledgment by Secretary of State Rogers that 'activity is back to what it was prior to that time' -- Mr. Nixon decided to delay the major American withdrawal he had been scheduled to announce." The whole Nixon strategy for ending the war, if strategy there is, could be vitiated by this maneuver." The editorial concluded by saying that "North Vietnam has gone far to disengage itself from dependence on China by sending home Chinese labor battalions, and the Viet Cong in Paris have offered to de-escalate the war if the United States takes the lead," and again urged a cease-fire.

On September 5, 1969, the Times urged the President to declare a truce for the occasion of Ho Chi Minh's funeral, in the hope that it could become the basis of an extended cease-fire. The column urged the gesture as an "immediate demonstration of goodwill and incentive to compromise."

The editorial of September 7, 1969, enlarged upon this theme, and suggested that moderates among the new leadership in Hanoi might well respond to such a U.S. initiative: "Ho's successors might be receptive to a persuasive allied overture," the editorial stated, and quoted Douglas Pike's speculation that the new leaders "may see in Ho Chi Minh's death a chance to graciously turn the page of history" to a peaceful settlement. "The great test for the allies is to do all they can to encourage such a transition in Hanoi Like Ho, they /the new leaders/ are deeply suspicious of the West. But, given a convincing demonstration of the genuineness of the will to peace in Washington and Saigon, they may well seize the opportunity to end the costly conflict"

On September 12, 1969, the editorial criticized the President for the U.S. handling of the Ho Chi Minh truce:

"Events of the past week in the wake of Ho Chi Minh's death have been particularly damaging to the credibility of Mr. Nixon's 'strategy for peace.' The President's tardy response to a Communist truce proposal, the contradictory statements on the ceasefire issued in Saigon, the refusal of South Vietnam to honor the stepdown which it had accepted and the failure of the allies to seek an extended truce betray lack of imagination, purpose, coordination and will to take risks for peace."

On September 16, the President announced a further reduction of the ceiling on U.S. troop strength in South Viet-Nam. The Times editorial of the next day, September 17, 1969, reacted with scorn:

"Although it is another timid move in the right direction, Mr. Nixon's decision to withdraw an additional 35,000 troops is hardly likely to impress the enemy abroad or critics at home as the 'significant' step toward peace the President says it is. Nor can this modest reduction in American strength be expected to jolt the reluctant Saigon regime into more vigorous cooperation in the essential joint effort to negotiate a compromise settlement.

.

"The more significant figure is not the 60,000 Americans who are to be withdrawn from Vietnam but the 484,000 who will still be in the field a year after Mr. Nixon was elected on a promise to bring the war

to a speedy conclusion. This is certainly many more troops than would be needed to conduct holding operations while a political settlement is negotiated. It is far more than should be required if the uncompromising South Vietnamese Government were really prepared to fight its own battles.

"Once more Mr. Nixon has forfeited an opportunity to make a bold move toward peace. He has apparently yielded to the unreconstructed generals in Saigon -- American and Vietnamese -- who would still pursue the futile goal of military victory."

The editorial of September 27, 1969, responded to the President's press conference of the previous day with skepticism:

"Many question whether the Administration's withdrawal of 60,000 American troops -- by mid-December -- is really an adequate response to the two-thirds drop in North Vietnamese infiltration over the past nine months that the President himself reports. If, as Mr. Nixon acknowledges, there has been no enemy summer offensive and there is little prospect of a fall offensive, it is difficult to justify the heavy military pressure still being maintained by allied forces."

The Times editorial writer pondered a few more days over the President's calls for national unity, and then declared that the President had not earned the unity and support that he sought. The editorial of October 2, 1969, is herein quoted in full:

"Shortly before Election Day last year, candidate Richard Nixon said that the American people needed 'new ideas, new men and new leadership . . . to bring an end to the war.' The American people agreed and gave the Republican challenger a clear mandate to do the job.

"Nearly a year later, and more than eight months after Mr. Nixon's inauguration, the Paris peace talks are stalemated, the war grinds on and more than half a million American fighting men remain mired in Vietnam, fighting to preserve a South Vietnamese Government that shows no serious inclination to compromise, reform itself or fight its own battles. Like his predecessor, President Nixon finds himself confronted with a rising tide of dissent at home. Also like his predecessor, he has appealed to the country -- in strikingly Johnsonian terms -- not to 'buckle and run.'"

"There is no question that unity at home would strengthen the Government's effort to negotiate an honorable settlement in Paris with a tough

and stubborn foe. But the support for which Mr. Nixon pleads requires a confidence that he has not earned by his actions to date.

"The new President has not brought any significant new ideas to the Vietnam problem. His withdrawals of American troops so far have been token withdrawals. Massive American forces in the field have continued the aggressive tactics initiated under President Johnson. His offer of free choice for the South Vietnamese people -- which had been heard before -- has been openly repudiated by the words and deeds of a Saigon Government he continues uncritically to support.

"Nor has Mr. Nixon greatly altered the cast of characters on the American side of the Vietnam drama. His commander in the field, his Army Chief of Staff and his chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are all men identified with the Vietnam failures of the past. His Ambassador in Saigon was President Johnson's Ambassador. His chief negotiator in Paris was twice Mr. Johnson's man in Saigon. As to leadership, the Administration's recent confused response to the Ho Chi Minh funeral truce has led many to wonder who, if anyone, was in control.

"The American people need to be united for peace. But, as Mr. Nixon himself observed a year ago, unity cannot be won with old ideas, old faces and no leadership."